

THE LIFE OF AILRED OF RIEVAULX. By Walter Daniel. Translated from the Latin with Introduction and Notes by F. M. Powicke, F.B.A. (Thomas Nelson and Sons; 15s.)

A book of this kind demands, from the present reviewer at least, appreciation rather than criticism. Few, even among medieval experts, can be qualified to sit in judgment upon the work of Sir Maurice Powicke, of whose scholarly integrity there is evidence on every page of this interesting study. Walter Daniel was a Cistercian monk of Rievaulx Abbey from about the year 1150; he was there under the rule of Abbot Ailred, who died in January, 1167. Subsequently he wrote the saint's 'Life', or those parts of it which appealed to him most—for, as Sir Maurice makes clear, Walter Daniel was not without his limitations as a biographer. The present translation and critical notes are supplemented by a lengthy and informative introduction and an adequate index; so that the work as a whole is indispensable to anyone wishing for a first-hand account of the life and times of that remarkable personality, Ailred of Rievaulx.

About St Ailred himself Sir Maurice supplies much information in his invaluable introduction. The historian's critical faculty nowhere conceals his admiration and sympathy for his subject. It is worthy of note, for example, that 'Gilbert of Hoiland and Jocelin of Furness give the salient traits of Ailred's character more clearly than Walter Daniel does. The personality of the abbot is somewhat obscured by Walter's fanciful and exuberant style.' The following passage from Jocelin of Furness may be quoted:

'He [Ailred] was a man of fine old English stock. He left school early and was brought up from boyhood in the court of King David with Henry the king's son and Waldef. In course of time he became first a monk, afterwards abbot of Rievaulx. His school learning was slight, but as a result of careful self-discipline in the exercise of his acute natural powers, he was cultured above many who have been thoroughly trained in secular learning. He drilled himself in the study of Holy Scripture, . . . he was wholly inspired by a spirit of wisdom and understanding. Moreover he was a man of the highest integrity, of great practical wisdom, witty, eloquent, a pleasant companion, generous and discreet. And, with all these qualities, he exceeded all his fellow prelates of the Church in his patience and tenderness. He was full of sympathy for the infirmities, both physical and moral, of others.'

Gratitude is due to both editor and publisher for making available an account at once so attractive and critically satisfying.

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